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ABSTRACT

This document analyzes the construction of a mythical representation through television, focusing on the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) television coverage of the violence which took place at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels prior to the 1985 European Cup Final between Juventus and Liverpool. As background for this analysis, a concept of Liverpool--variously interpreted and produced to explain local political, economic, social, and sporting events--is examined. The study directs special attention to the way in which commentators coped with the violent scenes which occurred before the football (soccer) match began. It was found that: (1) much of the commentary seemed to be an emotional response to the unpleasant events that happened; and (2) the particular discourse that resulted was characterized by dominant images of Liverpool, working class youth, and leisure in British society, and a particularly strident attitude which facilitated the production of the television report. Analysis of the BBC coverage revealed that, far from being an objective, balanced, and transparent view of events, the spectacle served to function as a basis for a sustained attack upon Liverpool. The paper looks in detail at how this came about, examines the concept of myth as an exploratory vehicle in media studies, and points out some difficulties in its use. (34 end notes/ references) (CGD)

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Television and the construction of myth: Liverpool 1985

by

Adrian Bailey and Oliver Leaman

Paper presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

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In this paper we shall analyse a particular instance of the construction of a mythical representation through television. A concept of Liverpool has been variously interpreted nd produced to explain local political, economic, social and sporting events. We shall examine some of the ways in which television has tried to reconcile possible different readings to present an apparently coherent and unified view which constitutes a satisfactory programme from a production and audience perspective. Particular attention will be paid to the BBC coverage of the violence which took place at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels prior to the 1985 European Cup Final between Juventus and Liverpool. We shall draw out in conclusion the theoretical implications of this discussion for our understanding of the notion of television myth.

I

In this paper we are concerned with the analysis of a particular instance of the construction of what might be called a mythical representation through television. We are particularly interested in the coverage of the Liverpool-Juventus football match at the Heysel Stadium on May 29th 1985, and the ways in which the commentators coped with the violent scenes which took place for some time before the game started. The particular discourse which resulted was crucially characterised by dominant images of Liverpool, working class youth and leisure in British society, and a particularly strident political attitude which facilitated the production of the television report. As well as looking in detail at how this came about, we shall examine the concept of myth as an explanatory vehicle in media studies, and point to some difficulties in its use.

Liverpool as a concept has a powerful grip on British imagination.(1) The concept is essentially one of extremes. There is without doubt a good deal of empirical basis to the notion of Liverpool as a site of particularly extreme deprivation and change. The history of the city and its port is characterised by traumatic labour relations stemming from a tradition of casual labour and the decline of the shipping economy. Despite the introduction of new industries to the satellite towns, the economic decline of the city and the rapid emigration of its population continued unabated after the Second World War. Due to its association with the Catholic Church, the local Labour Party was initially unsuccessful in an environment more akin to that of Belfast than mainland Britain. Eventually a right-wing Labour administration came into power, so right-wing and distrusted that its main opposition came from a large populist Liberal Party. The seventies and eighties were marked by political instability and a disinclination to address directly the severe problems of the city. The 1981 riots brought Liverpool very much back into public awareness again, with representations of the city as a hopeless case, in permanent and irreversible decline, with collapsing houses and schools as its main architectural feature. The political instability did not come to an end with the election of majority Labour administrations in 1983 and 1984, since these were represented as Militant, extremist and in continual struggle with the Government. The image of extreme political opposition to central government has become thoroughly internalised by the local Labour Party, which represents itself as in the vanguard of the struggle of the working class against the present Conservative administration.

Contrasting, and yet connected with these negative extreme images is a set of positive extreme images. These represent a cultural vibrancy in terms

of music, drama, film and especially football. The images of Liverpool in the 'Swinging Sixties' were of a dynamic and creative city whose youth had purchasing power and produced a succession of highly successful pop groups. There has been a long tradition of Liverpool comics and playwrights, and Harold Wilson sat for a Liverpool parliamentary constituency for most of his career. The city's football clubs, Liverpool and Everton, have been particularly dominant in the last twenty five years. With the arrival of Wilson in Downing Street in 1964 and the Beatles in the charts from the early sixties onwards, northern (including Liverpool) accents became socially acceptable. The image of Liverpool was of a lively, cosmopolitan and interesting environment, inhabited by good-natured and humorous people.

Economic difficulties in the seventies began to shift the image, Liverpool being represented as a 'strike city', and a turning point seems to have coincided with the 1981 riots, which occurred in a number of cities but caused the most physical and personal damage in Liverpool. The cultural centre of the city, Liverpool 8[(2)], suddenly came to be known as Toxteth and the media fell on the city to photograph damaged buildings and Dickensian living conditions. A German film crew even filmed as riot damage ruins caused by German bombings in the last war. As Michael Hesseltine's Task Force set off to paint the slums, a series of documentaries and news items on the poverty, unemployment, deindustrialisation, policing and ethnic minorities was produced. The national popularity of writers such as Alan Bleasdale and Willie Russell ensured that the troubles of the city were given a large dramatic audience. Vestiges of the previous positive images did survive, in particular the humour (which could now be represented as ironical) and the football. Both Everton and Liverpool had very successful seasons in the eighties, and the behaviour of their supporters was represented by the media in a very favourable light. This was by contrast both with local political and economic chaos, and the apparent growth of violence associated with football in England. The moral panic over football violence (in itself an interestingly ambiguous phrase) was skillfully combined by Mrs Thatcher with the Bradford fire tragedy in the setting up of the Popplewell Enquiry, which ensured that by the time of the May 29th match in the Heysel Stadium football in Britain was in considerable public opprobrium. But there was no reason initially to expect the Liverpool supporters to behave at the match in an objectionable manner despite memories of the violence by Roma supporters at the previous year's European Cup Final, and the early reports leading up to the match on the day gave the impression of a normal build-up to the event itself. Fortunately for the commentators, there were sufficient images of Liverpool in their conceptual baggage to enable them to make sense of what transpired on the evening itself.

Some time after events in Brussels, the Observer was one of the few British papers to suggest the possibility of different types of story being told about the Heysel horror. Jonathan Foster wrote a piece in early September which gives central place to comments from Liverpudlians:

> The disaster could have happened with supporters from any club. But the reaction was all the greater because it was Liverpool.... We didn't need this disaster to bring Liverpool down - it has already been written to shreds. But the media and the people in the south seize on anything to knock the city.

and:

> When it comes to crying out with passion over unemployment, bad housing and despair over a generation with no future, then there is virtual silence. (3)

Carla Gonnelli's father died in the stadium. Her own life was saved by a Liverpool supporter, John Welsh. After the game, she, like hundreds of other Liverpool and Juventus fans, forged links with each other. While staying as guest of a Merseyside family, Carla Gonnelli said:

> Everyone in Italy is sorry about what happened in Brussels, and they do not blame Liverpool. It could have happened anywhere and to any club. (4)

In Liverpool the day after the match, beneath the shock was not shame but anger - at the ways in which events had been treated on television. What was generally lacking, and remains lacking, in the media follow-up stories is the voice of the ordinary supporter. What has been present is virtually a wholesale acceptance by all commentators that the television coverage was unproblematic and offered a 'true' picture of events. These views of what happened were readily framed in ways which show why the overall interpretation of Liverpool fans' being to blame was so easily accepted.

The Observer piece above was atypically sympathetic to Liverpool fans, but it came (in news terms) long after the event, and appeared off the front page. In June, just after the match, the Observer in common with the rest of Fleet Street, gave prominence to 'the carnage.... the mob violence' and the need for 'the taming of the beast.'(5) The article contained the sort of 'liberal objectivity' associated with the paper: it questioned the suitability of the stadium, and criticised both the Belgian police and the organising authorities, but concluded that there could be no question that the 'savagery of the Liverpool attacks' was solely responsible for the 'violence which erupted'. Here is familiar vocabulary: beasts, savages, mobs - and uncontrollable eruptions.(6)

An article on the same day in the Sunday Telegraph demanded that the 'Calibans' should be 'locked up in their caves'[7]. The Observer, refuting the 'original sin' doctrine, favoured the theory that working class people behave badly because of their deprived environment: 'among the fans is a solid core of hardened youths, many from deprived inner cities where they live without hope or stable moral values.... They are best described as raw, lower working class.'[8] Ironically, the same edition of the paper carried a feature which began, 'The media image of the football hooligan, of a skinhead "bootboy" in Doctor Martens and drainpipe bleached denims, is hopelessly out of date.'[9] Nevertheless (and it seems that the identification of football hooligans with expensive Italian design clothes and upper working class males is becoming increasingly accurate), one section of the press clings tenaciously to the positivist equation that bad environment plus lower working class male youth equals vandalism, hooliganism and riot. Because the story could be framed so neatly along these lines, most commentators accepted the 'given' version of events and failed to see the BBC mediation of what was being covered as problematic.

Like the Sunday Telegraph, a second important section of the press subscribes to a theory which sees working class youth as inherently bad. Prescriptions based on this belief call for stricter control measures and firmer discipline. But although each theory differs in terms of causation and 'cure', they both lead more or less to an acceptance of the 'badness' of working class youth. Both theories also have in common a view of human beings as 'empty organisms', either acted upon by genetic programming or external environmental factors. Both theories compound to centre upon the 'problem' of youth, and both legitimise action upon or about youth. The political solutions to the 'problem' will be discussed and implemented by expert individuals and agencies with the ability and knowledge to structure youth sub-cultures in socially approved ways. The possibility of individual life and will is denied by the conception of monolithic 'working class youth.' Similarly, with reference to Heysel the media denied the voice of individual spectators (except where subsumed by the dominant discourse), and presented instead the many headed hydra that is the mob.

One account of 'Heysel' (now a useful shorthand for connoting football violence) and its aftermath came from Ian Jack (whose Sunday Times article helped win him the 1986 British Press Award for specialist writer of the year) who visited both Liverpool and Turin, the home town of the Juventus football team. His article represents Turin as a pleasant hard-working place where a fine historical tradition lives through the present; on the other hand, Liverpool is -

as it has been since it developed as a port - full of drunkards and thugs.[10] Ian Jack ends his feature recalling his leaving of Liverpool: as his London bound Pullman 'slid slowly uphill through the green slime of Edge Hill tunnel', he asked, 'Is it the pig who makes the sty or the sty who makes the pig?' Gathering speed through 'the neat pastures of Cheshire: Volvo country, homes with loft conversions and ceramic hobs', the wheels of the train seemed to answer, 'the sty, the sty, the sty.'[11] Jack's elevation of Turin (continental/civilized) and despair over Liverpool (British/wild) is a reflection of the BBC coverage of Heysel during which, as we shall see, the Liverpool fans were constructed as mindless animals, and the Juventus supporters as peace-loving and sporting.

Edward Vulliamy in the New Statesman gave one of the more thoughtful 'leftish' accounts of what had happened at Heysel[12] but like Ian Jack contrasted the 'violent chauvinism' of the Liverpool fans with the Italian fans who were in Brussels simply to enjoy a good game of football. Vulliamy's account seems more valid than several others, at first because he was present in the stadium; however, a moment's reflection suggests that this is irrelevant since what is at stake is the interpretative frameworks given to events - notwithstanding the highly problematical aspects of witnessing either the pro-filmic or the highly mediated televisual version of events - which can never be 'pure' or all-seeing or perspicuous. Knowledges from separate discourses than what is suggested in this paper as being the dominant discourse, suggest, for example, that the representing of Italian fans as 'innocent' (and historically verifiable as so) is very odd: in Rome, after the 1984 European Cup Final between Liverpool and Roma, Liverpool fans were ambushed with military precision by Roma fans whose retrieval of iron bars, rocks of concrete and knives hidden outside the ground before the game resulted in such violence that the police authorities were forced to bring armoured trucks firing tear gas onto the streets. While thousands of people from Liverpool have horrifying stories about what happened that night, it is interesting to note that the media gave very little attention to them (but an early passing reference was made to events in Rome during build-up to the Heysel game, when local BBC television made reference to the fact that a thousand Belgian police were on the streets of Brussels to prevent repetition of the previous year's scenes when 'Italian fans rioted.'[13]).

Vulliamy's account and analysis is more sophisticated than most. He relates the circulation of myths and ideas circulated by the mass media during the Falklands crisis to British soccer hooligans abroad. Basically, he sees a contradiction between the whipping up of a patriotism against the 'Argies'[14] in the Falklands campaign, and condemnation of a parallel nationalism manifested in the football grounds of Europe. This argument, which touches in interesting

ways on notions of ideology, found similar expression in a number of left wing journals, but it still accepts (on behalf of others) the sort of 'blame' for what happened at Heysel narrated by television. It also perpetuates the mythology that English (/British: see later) fans are different in undesirable ways from European fans, and this is related to the further mythology that the level of violence and hooliganism in English football fans is new and on an unprecedented scale. For the Left, 'Thatcherism' is the cause; for the Right, decline in discipline, control and moral values are all causes. The mythology gives credence to calls for urgent increased police control, here supporting wider calls for repressive measures which have nothing to do with football.

Right wing commentaries took the BBC coverage as 'real'. The day after, Anthony Burgess asked, in the Daily Mail, 'What has gone wrong with the lower orders?'(15) An answer came from Richard West, in the Spectator: '.... the collapse of discipline and teaching in our schools.... is no more evident than in Liverpool.... (where) a whole generation of pampered, undisciplined children has grown up with the habits of petulance, envy, greed and wanton cruelty as seen last week on the television screens of the world.'(16) Brian Walden pointed out that if 'our' urban working classes are 'not restrained by Christian morality, then they are not restrained at all.'(17)

The Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, declared on BBC and IBA news programmes on May 30th that 'those involved have brought shame and disgrace to the country', later lamenting that Liverpool always was a violent place. Even sympathetic portrayals of Liverpool such as Alan Bleasdale's Boys from the Blackstuff, centred on dignity and despair, have helped reinforce negative and violent images of the city. For Mrs Thatcher (rumoured during the 1985 Liverpool budget crisis to have forbidden any ministers visiting the place) here was an opportunity to separate the city from the assumed national consensus.

A final example of how the BBC coverage was received indicates the contrast made between the extreme positive images of the city which were circulating until about a decade ago. Frank Corless, 'the Mirror's Man in Liverpool' has 'a fierce pride' in the city. For him, 'Liverpool is a place of passion with a unique magic of its own.' This sentimentalising of Liverpool has distinct similarities with those limiting representations of Scotland through Tartanry and Kailyardism.(18) The sentimental stories centring on Liverpool contrast with the supposedly unprecedented breaking out of violence and related ideas - such as a weakening of control by authority or an outbreak of 'disease'. For Corless, 'The sight of mindless thuggery and the harrowing

scenes of carnage brough tears to my eyes.... it was the brutal face of violent Liverpool we all hate.' (19)

We turn now to the BBC coverage and argue that the totality of that coverage was more than a commentary upon a 'window' supplied by the cameras, but represented the construction of a narrative which fed into and out of ideological and political factors beyond football. This will explain why later commentaries accepted the narrative as 'true' - for they too were feeding into and out of ideological and political factors beyond a football game. What was reflected was the range of dominant social narratives' constructing stories about 'the enemy within', bolstering the values and normality of the constructed national consensus at a period of crisis.

III

Analysis of the BBC coverage of the European Cup Final in 1985 reveals that far from being an 'objective', 'balanced' and 'transparent' view of events, the spectacle served to function as the basis of a sustained attack upon Liverpool. The familiar right wing theory of containment mentioned above was employed, and it was clear who was to be contained. The instant narrative and instant analyis came so readily to the men telling the stories precisely because they felt comfortable in the obviousness of such analyses and narratives. Added to this, the obvious errors which could be identified simply by noting the clear mismatch between sound and vision, and the refusal to admit to such errors or refer to them in providing the seeming 'seamlessness' of the coverage, were further factors in the mediation of events. Finally, the way that contradictions apparent on content analysis of the 'surface level' of the coverage were subsumed by the total coverage, needs noting. The coverage has been accepted as 'true'.

To bring about audience maximisation, and in particular to attract the genders excluded by the match coverage, early in the day television viewers were presented with happy, red clad fans, many of them in family groups, leaving Liverpool Airport. Reference was made in the voice over of the 'near riot which occurred in Rome when Liverpool fans were attacked after the game' the previous year, and viewers were assured that the Belgian police were out in force. There was no sign of the dominant story of English hooliganism abroad that was appropriated later. Indeed, the commentaries at this stage drew on the empirical fact of Liverpool's excellent reputation for crowd behaviour abroad, and the unique lack of trouble between fans of the city's first division teams (who had, a few months previously chanted

'Merseyside' at the end of a Cup Final between the teams at Wembley). If anything, at this stage the Italian fans were portrayed as the villains but what followed turned the story on its head.

At 6.30 p.m. Stuart Hall told BBC viewers in the North West of England that there was serious trouble in the Heysel stadium. BBC Radio Merseyside announced the trouble at about the same time. At 7 p.m. national coverage began. Terry Wogan's chat show had been displaced by the match coverage, but he appeared for a few minutes with guest Bruce Forsyth to exchange banter with Jimmy Hill who was in the studio with guest 'experts', Terry Venables and Graeme Souness. Wogan and Forsyth imitated the friendly face of football: each man wore a scarf; Wogan drank from a pint glass (a dimpled one, which semiotically was a bad move since it connoted middle class and southern) to maintain the idea that both men were really working class at heart they were surrounded by empty crisp packets and some 20 cans of beer to keep them refreshed throughout the evening: nothing wrong in getting sloshed here. This took place half an hour after Liverpool and north western viewers knew that there had almost certainly been several deaths at the stadium. Hill, all smiles, said 'It is some match!' and the titles rolled over the familiar 'Match of the Day' signature tune.

This was followed by an ashen-faced Hill who told us that 'Hooliganism has struck again.' But in the seamless flow of television, some 45 seconds earlier he had been laughing with Wogan and Forsyth, and anticipating a great match. Within 45 seconds, it appears, he had assimilated information about events in Brussels and interpreted them. The 'again' points to the psychology of the situation, for just as repetition is beloved by news staff, so Hill has for years been construing the football world through a personal construct which seeks replication of hooliganistic events.(20) The question is begged of why the coverage began in such jaunty style when local and regional BBC stations had been reporting the disaster for 30 minutes.(21)

Hill's next remark contradicted his first, and the story he went on to help construct:

> I understand that a wall collapsed at one point which was the origination of some trouble and certainly the thing that may have caused some of those injuries. I'm not suggesting those injuries were caused or inflicted by crowds of either side.

When alternative readings - like this one by Hill himself - were raised, they were closed off by the dominant narrative. There were, in fact, individual alternative interpretations of events, notably by footballer Graeme Souness, but these were few and far between.

Hill transferred viewers to John Motson in Brussels who reported that Liverpool fans had moved into the area provided for Juventus supporters. One unacknowledged error here was that John Motson was in fact Barry Davies, but more seriously, no reference was made later to correctly point out that Juventus fans were occupying a part of the ground designated for neutral supporters - which other narratives could see as one aspect of the gross negligence and culpability of the stadium administrators. Motson/Davies failed to point out that many fans had entered the ground, without tickets, through holes in the stadium wall, nor did he say why Liverpool fans had moved. Liverpool fans have since given their own account, an account which found no national take-up, of their being pelted by missiles thrown by Juventus fans, and of a ten year old boy from Liverpool being kicked on the ground by Juventus fans. This is retrospective and open to question, but there was no question in the mind of the BBC commentator who hesitated not at all in attributing blame, concluding that 'those of us in the commentary box felt once again an embarassment at being British.' That word 'again', again. Bobby Charlton, also in the commentary box said 'You don't know the type of mentality that would perform such acts.' The screen filled with pictures of Liverpool fans running, and Motson/Davies said that 'some of the fans still seem to want to be embroiled in fighting.' Repeated inspection of these pictures do not suggest any fighting going on, but this is not significant in the light of the commentators comment that ' I think these scenes are a recording.' This is something of a problem for the reliability of an 'eye-witness' (Motson/Davies) at the stadium apparently relying on television pictures for his information. Reflecting Hill's earlier comment, he said, 'One doesn't want to apportion blame', an odd contradiction. Having evoked righteous nausea over the horrifying scenes, he went on to discuss the likely successor to Joe Fagin, Liverpool's manager whose retirement had been announced that day. A hasty cut back to the studio did not help matters.

Hill and his guests discussed, and even joked about, likely candidates for the post of Liverpool's new manager, and the prospects of the exciting game to come. A return to the stadium had the cameras panning over a peaceful scene, and 30 seconds later a special news report announced that 'trouble is still going on.' One fact was certain: 28 people were dead.

By now, the dominant story that Liverpool fans were to blame was established. Hill, Venables and Souness discussed the situation, with Hill interrupting Venables as new pictures came in: 'It's still going on, the same kind of appalling action.... you'll remember Luton and Millwall' (a reference to televised crowd trouble at that match). The fact that the pictures of

ructious supporters showed Juventus fans escaped Hill's notice, and that of Graeme Souness who maintained 'It doesn't happen anywhere else in Europe.' While the cameras continued to pick out violent Juventus behaviour, Terry Venables prescribed fear as the key to the solution: 'The fear factor is the thing.... you've got to frighten them.... there's no fear in hardly anything is there? The police don't frighten them.' Souness reaffirmed that Italian fans 'don't want to be tearing off each other's heads.'; in the terms of Souness's metaphor, the pictures seemed to contradict this.

Here, Hill repeated that it was the wall's collapsing which was the cause of the deaths, rather than direct aggression, but the main discourse of the evening presented a different narrative, from which was excluded not only the possibility of culpability being attributed to Juventus fans, but also to the police and organising officials. Thus, some nine months later a BBC radio magazine programme routinely (and incidentally) referred to 'the murder of 38 Juventus fans' in May, 1985.(22)

Back at the stadium, Barry Davies said confidently that 'we're seeing pictures of how it started.' We have examined these pictures many times but, while it is clear that the pictures coincide with the moments leading up to the disaster, they certainly do not show <u>how</u> the trouble started. Also, Davies's military metaphor that Liverpool fans 'charged' Juventus fans is not supported by the pictures which are more accurately described as showing an ebbing and flowing of the crowd. However, Davies called it 'a substitute for war', a comment picked up immediately by Hill on the return to the studio but not before Davies had claimed the unprecedented nature of the events:

> Now, suddenly, (football has) been besmirched because of an attitude which a decade ago was totally foreign to the British character and which has now grown until it is a cancer on society.

One feature of the evening's coverage was that it reverberated with other stories about the new 'cancer in society' and was fed by other televisual constructions of law and order breaking down. It emphasised that this was not football's problem, but a <u>British</u> problem, and the fact that it was <u>unprecedented</u> enabled it to be highlighted against the supposed previous harmony of national society - and fuel the call for increasingly severe emergency measures from the Government to curb the problems.

Hill threw out for discussion the fact that there is national service in Spain and Italy (where the two guests earn pesetas and lire, and where there is no hooliganism). Venables and Souness having agreed that national service is a good thing, for no apparent reason Jimmy Hill began to insult Scottish people: 'Scots are very welcome in England.... I think that if they came

down in peace they'd be very welcome in London.' Observing his Scottish guest's discomfiture, he switched to focusing on the Government's responsiblity for restoring law and order. Venables agreed, noting that in Spain you see 'the little boy, and his father, and his grandfather.... 120,000 people with not a problem' (and with no female fans presumably), and the reason for this is 'fear because they're frightened to step out of line.' So, asked Hill, do we need 'more brutal action by the police'? You do, responded Souness, because 'You're not talking about human beings here; you're talking about animals.'

Back at the ground, Bobby Charlton proposed the return (sic) of 'corporal punishment..... they have to be afraid of something.' As the cameras zoomed in and out of scenes of marauding Juventus supporters stoning the police, Davies claimed that 'A few years ago you didn't hear obscenities on the Kop.' This is a ridiculous statement but an interesting one in suggesting the gap between traditional working class supporters and those who have made 'football respectable for the middle class audience (which) involved the redefinition of previously common-place behaviours as no longer acceptable'[23].

Davies' physical distance from ordinary fans, and his mental distance over the years, made it difficult to understand: 'Still there are expressions on people's faces which it's difficult to define.' Even more difficult to explain is Davies' insistence on ascribing the actions of Juventus fans, as shown on the screen, to Liverpool fans. He made a passing reference to the fact that Juventus supporters were misbehaving, but this was lost under the weight of the dominant narrative. Also lost under this weight was the report from a BBC journalist, Wesley Kerr, which was presented as an eye-witness report; Kerr reported that after the wall collapsed 'astonishingly the first people called onto the scene were riot police, and it was 40 minutes before we saw a stretcher.'

In London, Hill glared at the camera to say that he was having trouble understanding the mentality of some viewers. Here is an extraordinary confusion of identities as Hill made appeal to the consensual 'You':

> I suppose you wouldn't believe it but people are ringing up from Scotland to say that we are using the word British supporters; on a night like this I don't think anyone's scoring national points over one country or another. English - they may come from Liverpool, some of them may be Scots, some of them may be Welsh. I don't know.

Perhaps this indicates the sort of compression by which one focus of attack (specifically Liverpool football fans and, generally, negative images of Liverpool) functions as a symbol in a narrative attack on the working class of Britain, and how national identity is at least partly a construct which both excludes and includes countries and regions (as in for example, the Scottish World Cup team in 1978 being the focus of 'British' hopes).

Quite the most astonishing moments of the coverage came shortly. As the cameras continued to focus on pockets of violent Juventus fans, we saw a man being beaten by those fans. He escaped from them, and ran across the running track towards the police who were keeping a safe distance from the Italians. As he ran, a brick, thrown by a Juventus fan hit him on the back of the head. When he reached the police they began to thrash him about the head with truncheons. This delighted Jimmy Hill.'Look! He's (the policeman) actually doing his own corporal punishment, and never mind the birch, he's administering it himself.' Souness was cut off in mid-sentence by Hill as he tried to point out what had actually taken place. Hill was drooling over the sight of fans showing a 'total disregard for law and order', and so excited that he was, as he had been, unaware the pictures were of Juventus fans. When these fans unfurled a huge banner - LIVERPOOL, RED ANIMALS - which was obviously a pre-meditated piece of mischief, Hill's response was, 'Juventus fans too have a touch of the hooligan brush.'

Shortly before the players came onto the pitch we witnessed continuing scenes of Juventus fans' tearing down fences and hurling missiles at the police. But the story had already denied their violence, so when Davies again questioned 'the sort of mentality we're now watching', it hardly mattered for by then the whole coverage, the totality of sound and vision, had constructed the narrative elements of Liverpool's violence, savagery and animalism - those same features reiterated in subsequent coverage. Finally, Davies asked whether the British-Liverpool riots were 'just hooliganism' or 'inspired by a more frightening backdrop.'

The Liverpool players ran onto the pitch. Behind them Juventus fans continued running wild.

IV

In the account of the BBC report and its consequences, the use of the concept of myth and mythology is designed to highlight aspects of the structure of the media event which would otherwise be hidden. Does it in fact do this? Since Roland Barthes' Mythologies it has become customary to analyse mass culture in terms of myth and mythological systems. This approach emphasises the ways in which the media tend to do away with the complexity of human acts, and set out to naturalise contingent and historical facts to give them the appearance of permanence and necessity. A result is that the audience may regard the facts as inevitable aspects of life in any society, as ineveitable aspects of life itself, and thus internalise the values of

the society in which they live. Myth is a result of signification and ambiguity. Technically speaking ,it is a second order semiotic system in which the sign constituted by the first system is a signifier in the second. The result of this structure is to bring about an ambiguity in its meaning, which the text exploits to create the impression that the real referent of the first system embodies the concept signified by the second. It is not always clear precisely what Barthes thinks is involved in myth, and sometimes it seems to be enough for myth to be implicated, for something with its 'closed silent existence' to be appropriated by society and transformed into an 'oral state'. But on the whole the trend of his argument is that myth is more than a necessary condition of communication, but in addition a structural condition of the direction which that communication takes. He says that 'myth is too rich, and what is in excess is precisely its motivation.' (24) Mythical language and representation goes further than it need do given the state of affairs it purports to reflect. Yet it would be misleading to regard myth as errors. The point of using the terminology of myth is to emphasise that what is in question here is not error at all in the form of erroneous belief. After all, 'myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion.' (25)

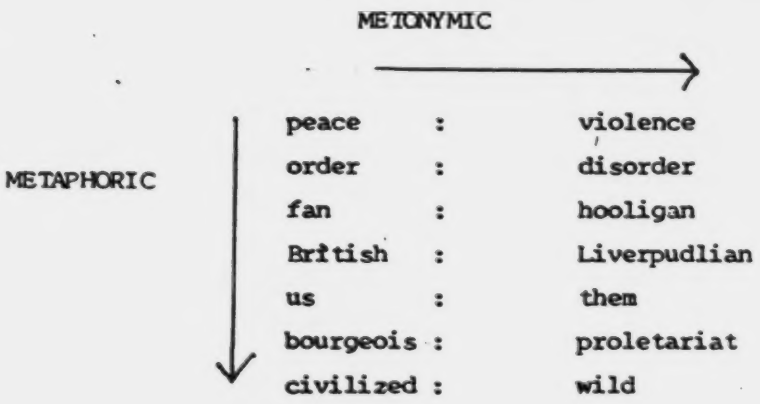
A key feature of myths is that they have narrative form. As Stuart Hall has argued:

> The raw historical event cannot in that form be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. It can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of a television language. In the moment where the historical event passes under the sign of language, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event. (26)

A narrative is an organisation of specific events, and while some aspects of the structure of myth may be reversible, it is significant that a narrative has a beginning which fixes the present in the past. This is often done by stipulating a dramatically important series of events, and the drama is represented by the style, which could well utilize oppositions and their resolution, and which may also employ aspects of unconscious symbolism so that the message transmitted by the myth has an impact at a number of levels. The point of the myth, by establishing a narrative, is to locate a set of circumstances in an original number of events. The result is to provide a point of reference beyond which there is no necessity to go; the series of questions about the topic in question comes to an end. In this way myths were originally techniques for blocking off explanation, and their being valued led to their place in the cognitive scheme making them eligible as devices for legitimating social organization. A powerful myth consists of

symbols which call up profound feelings and commitments, and employ a style of expression which presents a dramatic tension between opposed objects or forces which is somehow resolved.

One way of illustrating how this may be represented is by analysing the Heysel commentary using a linguistic model, interpreting the passage from a positive interpretation of Liverpool supporters to the claim that they murdered 38 innocent Juventus fans as a considerably abbreviated syntagmatic chain of mythic units, forming a metonymic axis from left to right. Reading from top to bottom, we have paradigmatic associations, or metaphoric transformation. In this way we can make a model of the series of identifications made in symbolic thought which could be understood as lying behind the commentary on the event itself.(27)



This model should not be taken to represent an explanation of the events in the Heysel Stadium, but rather as an expression of how reality seemd to the commentators, an illustration of how things were in terms of their fears, wishes, hopes and so on. There is no doubt that one's fears and wishes are connected with one's beliefs about reality, but the point of using the language of myth is to emphasise that the way in which we report on events is not necessarily to provide an explanatory description of the content of one's belief about reality. The commentators for the BBC were seriously expressing something in communicating their mythology to their audience. They understood the point of their narrative. The narrative is, in Wittgenstein's words, a 'graphic illustration' or 'perspicuous presentation' of how they or we look at things. So much of the commentary was an emotional response to the unpleasant events at the time, like the ritual calls for draconian punishment. We might compare these ritual calls to the descriptions which Frazer provides of so-called primitive people burning their enemy in effigy. As Wittgenstein comments, 'This is obviously not based on a belief that it will have a definite effect on the object which (it) represents. It aims at some satisfaction and it achieves it. Or rather,

not aim at anything: We act in this way and then feel satisfied.'[28]

One of the aspects of television reports which bears emphasising is the attempt at perspicuity, at representing all at once what is happening. However complex the event, however difficult to discover the explanations of an event, television can represent the event both visually and aurally, and has at its disposal a bevy of highly-paid experts who will interpret the event to the audience (and for an interesting account of the transformation of 'commentators' into 'experts', with particular reference to Jimmy Hill, see Andrew Tudor's 'The Panels'[29]). As part of the transformation from commentator to expert, the reporters feel considerable uneasiness at confessing their doubt or ignorance over any issue relating to the game in question. As Nowell-Smith remarked:

> Better than the spectator on the terraces or the reporter in the press box, the television camera sees the truth - and Jimmy Hill confirms. No longer the (un)pleasure of uncertainty. The spectator as self-appointed arbiter is dispossessed; judgment is returned to the camera and the confirming voice: 'I think we cane see now that the player was definitely not offside.'
>
> (30)

The way in which television football is constructed leaves virtually no room for the audiences' independent opinions. The experts continually analyse and discuss, highlights and action replays are frequently produced, and the audience is bombarded with a ragbag of meanings and forms to help explain the action. (Of course, it is worth acknowledging that a large part of the audience is not paying very close attention to the visual aspect of the coverage or the aural aspect, though the latter, the dialogue of 'experts', predominates where attention is variable, and television is an aural before a visual medium[31]). This is not an incidental feature of television football, but as Colley and Davies argue[32] is a reflection of the spontaneous and unscripted nature of the game itself. Since no football match is a foregone conclusion, it requires to be heavily contextualised and provided with meanings which the audience can accept.

Despite the provision of a very definite frame of reference for the football event by the media organisation, it still represents itself as simply a neutral channel reflecting events to the audience.[33] The frame of reference is important, though, for its ability to produce entertaining and exciting programmes which can attract and hold a wide audience, most of whom are not football fans. The necessity to provide an entertaining programme works against any aim of providing a programme for football fans, with their specialised knowledge, about football, since it involves the creation of stars, of major aspects of the game, a whole accompanying discourse

involving the management of the team and their supporters. These disparate aspects of television football are held together by the narrative structure of the broadcasting enterprise itself. The narrative is not hard to maintain since the rules of the pro-filmic event and the televisual event are clear and the objective of the competition simple, but a great deal of supplementary matter must be incorporated into the television production in order to provide evidence of the expertise of the experts. Although the experts may endeavour to complicate the narrative as much as possible, the basic structure of the narrative is simple, with one answer to the problem set by the text and one explanation of why the discourse ended in one way rather than an other.

What is remarkable about the BBC coverage of the violence in the Heysel Stadium is that it was treated in much the same way as if it were the football itself. It was taken to have the same narrative structure as a football match, with one answer to the problem it posed and a requirement for the media to present a perspicuous grasp of the event as a whole. This facililitated the application to the event of a whole family of mythological concepts in terms of which the commentators could feel as though they had a grasp of what was goin g on. The emotional aspect of the occasion made it even easier to import an extensive variety of myths to achieve a cathartic effect. The violent events did not extend over a sufficiently long period for other kinds of commentator to be brought in - one thinks here of the replacement of David Coleman from covering the violent events in Munich in 1972 at the Olympic Games. Whatever criticisms may be made of political commentators covering violent confrontations, they do at least tend towards treating crowd troubles as complex and difficult problems, with no instant explanation of cause and no expectation of a solution to their apparent confusion in every case. Analysts of crowd behaviour would be expected to treat with respect the contradictions between different accounts of trouble, taking account of the different points of view and the essentially contested nature of the explanation of the event (which really consists of a concatenation of a number of discrete events in many cases rather than one easily identifiable event). How different this approach is from that followed by sports commentators! The employ a form of 'thinking which expounds but has ceased to enquire, a thinking which might.... be termed a "narrative philosophy" '.(34) The desire to preserve a narrative is so strong that all contradictions are mediated by the use of mythologies which are uncritically accepted from the ideological instruments available and combined to produce a synthesis which appears to have real explanatory purchase on what really took place.

One is inevitably reminded of the term bricolage introduced by Levi-Strauss in La Pensee sauvage as a metaphor for the mode of savage thought. The bricoleur is the handyman who makes things out of what lie ready for use, whether or not they are the most appropriate materials. The myth-maker (and here we might add the myth-user) allows the structure of his mind, already reproduced in the structure of society, to find reflection in the structure of the symbols that he puts together in a myth. The value of the symbols themselves is indifferent; what matters is only the relation they bear to each other. That is why he is like a handyman, creating a structure out of what comes to hand. This emphasis upon matters of arrangement and a lack of concern for the suitability of the things arranged has led the structuralists to identify this form of thought with savage as opposed to developed societies. It seems to be alive and well in the society of the television sports commentator.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This is not a phenomenon of the twentieth century and the mass media age. Literature about, or based upon, Liverpool has represented two extreme faces of Liverpool, especially since the seventeenth century. See George Chandler, Liverpool and Literature, Rondo Publications, Liverpool, 1974.

2. Liverpool, in Jung's famous dream was the 'pool of life', and for American poet Alan Ginsberg 'the centre of consciousness of the human universe.'

3. The Observer, 1/9/85.

4. This comment appeared in a Liverpool Football Club match programme at the start of the 1985/6 season.

5. The Observer, 2/6/85.

6. Garry Whannel has identified the same sort of language - mindless/senseless, maniacs/lunatics, foul/sub-human - in the sixties media coverage of football violence; see his 'Football, Crowd Behaviour and the Press' in Culture, Media and Society, Academic Press, London, 1979 pp. 327 - 342.

7. The Sunday Telegraph, 2/6/85. The comment came from Auberon Waugh.

8. See note 5.

9. A feature called 'Saturday Afternoon Fever' in the Weekend supplement of The Observer, 2/6/85.

10. The contrast between the two cities is made as starkly as this in the colour supplement of the Sunday Times 25/8/85, 'The Best of Times.... the Worst of Times' by Ian Jack.

11. Such extreme images of Liverpool are 'good copy'. It is worth noting that a reporter from the Liverpool Echo, Peter Phelps, won the coveted British Press Award of Journalist of the Year in 1986 for his 'investigative reports on Militant.'

12. Edward Vulliamy, 'Brits Go to War' in the New Statesman, 7/6/85. The comparison between the events at Heysel and the parallels with the Falklands are put strongly by Stuart Weir in the New Socialist, 7/85. He argues that the media were hypocritical for calling Brussels a

massacre when 'We are a far more violent nation in our daily practices than we ever dare to admit, and physical aggression and (often) beatings are an integral, though unspoken, part of the upbringing of our men.'

13. The decline of Liverpool supporters' behaviour is identified by Vulliamy as precisely as beginning in 1984; prior to this Liverpool, like Juventus, had a 'majestic history .... and a record of fair behaviour by fans.'

14. Several commentators have drawn attention to the fact that British fans abroad chanted 'Argies' as a term of abuse aimed at Latin/South American players, following the Falklands campaign.

15. The Daily Mail, 31/5/85.

16. The Spectator, 8/6/85.

17. The London Standard, 4/6/85. David Edgar in Marxism Today, 9/85 also quotes Auberon's Waugh's reference to Liverpool fans as 'our wonderful overpaid "workers" on a spree', and George Gale in the Express (31/5/85) who blames hooliganism on the fact that 'permissiveness has been the motto of the age.'

18. See Colin McArthur (ed), Scotch Reels, BFI, London, 1982 for a good collection of essays about representations of Scotland on film and television.

19. The Daily Mirror, 30/5/85.

20. A point also implied by Andrew Tudor's comments on 'forceful selective attention' forced by 'The Panels', in Bennett et al (eds) Popular Television and Film, BFI/OU, London, 1981, p. 153.

21. There is a certain questionmark over the relationship between local BBC and the national network. During Manchester United's league visit to Anfield in 1986, an attack with a spray cannister on the United players by a fan (never caught or identified) led to splash tabloid coverage - the Mirror gave it three pages - following up United manager Ron Atkinson's description of Liverpool as a hell hole. Some weeks later when 2, 000 United fans smashed down a gate at Southampton's ground and sprayed 20 police officers, the incident went unreported nationally, although Radio Solent

prepared a feature on it which they sent for national distribution to London.

22. BBC Radio 4, The World This Weekend, 24/3/86.

23. John Clarke, Football Hooliganism and the Skinheads, CCCS Sub and Popular Culture Series: No. 42, Birmingham, p. 10.

24. Roland Barthes, Mythologies, Granada, St Albans, 1982; p.126,n.7.

25. ibid, p. 129.

26. Stuart Hall, 'The Television Discourse: Encoding and Decoding', in Education and Culture No. 25, Council of Europe, 1974.

27. See E. Leach, Culture and Communication, CUP 1976, pp. 25 - 7.

28. Bemerkungen uber Frazer's Golden Bough, p. 4.

29. Andrew Tudor. See note 20.

30. G. Nowell-Smith, 'Television - Football - The World', Screen 19,4 (Winter 1978-9), p.51.

31. See John Ellis, Visible Fictions, RKP, London,1982, p. 127 ff.

32. Iain Colley and Gill Davies, 'Kissed by history: football as TV drama' a paper delivered to the Sporting Fictions Conference at the University of Birmingham, September 1981.

33. Of course, one crucial point is that the audience is differentiated, and many viewers in Liverpool brought their own cultural experience, and knowledge to the coverage to 'see through' the neutrality. Similarly, with reference to the little tale related in note 21, phone-in radio programmes on Merseyside were dominated for a week by indignant Liverpudlians protesting at the unfairness of the media's treatment of Liverpool. See also the comment on page 1 (note 3). Liverpool audiences are getting angry.

34. G. Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its symbolism, Schoken, NY p. 87.